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NURSE TEACHING A MOTHER TO BATHE A BABY



CLERK'S ROOM

THE BABIES' DISPENSARY AND HOSPITAL OF CLEVELAND

By KATHARINE DEWITT, R.N.

IN Cleveland, Ohio, there exists, still in its infancy, one of the most complete and far-reaching systems for the care of babies that has come to our knowledge. The aim was high at the start, for the institution is called The Babies' Dispensary and Hospital, though as yet only the dispensary exists, and that is housed in a temporary structure. The work done, however, is not to be measured by the size of the place in which it centres and from which it radiates. Its aims may be summed up under one great head,—the care of the baby, sick or well. Under this come the sub-headings which it implies,—the teaching of mothers how to care for their babies, how to bathe them, what to feed them, how to prepare their food and to care for the utensils used; the examination and care of sick babies; the distribution of pure milk; the modification of milk, etc.

Preventive work is not made an after-thought or a side issue, but is distinctly in the foreground. Efforts are made to make the dispensary's existence known and its objects understood throughout all the poorer communities of the city, by means of the visiting nurse association, by means of other charitable agencies, and by means of booklets and circulars printed in five languages. Mothers are urged to bring their well babies to the dispensary a few weeks after birth, that they may be examined and the mother instructed. Later, the baby is brought at regular intervals that its progress may be noted. The gospel of nursing a baby rather than feeding it is preached constantly and mothers too poor to purchase sufficient milk to keep themselves in good nursing condition are helped to obtain an ample supply at reasonable cost or, if needed, it is given.

That this preaching and teaching are bringing results is shown by the following anecdote:

“One mother, learning from the doctor that mother's milk was best for the baby, remembered what he had said when the baby was taken from her and she was sent to the hospital. Here she secretly pumped out her breast into a silk handkerchief which she washed when the water was brought to her bedside. When she returned home after two weeks and the baby was brought back to her, she had sufficient milk to nurse the baby and it is now well and strong.”

Let us go back a bit and see how the work started. In July, 1906, an infants' clinic was started under the auspices of a society called The Milk Fund Association, in connection with the visiting nurse association, whose nurses made the work of great value by following the little patients to their homes to see that directions were carried out. By the end of the summer the work had grown to such an extent that the idea of a permanent dispensary and hospital took shape, and in December, the present organization was incorporated and an appeal for funds to equip and carry on the work was made to the public. Enough money was secured to purchase land on East 35th Street, a place sufficiently clean and quiet for such work, and yet accessible by cars. Several old wooden houses were standing on the property, and one of these was remodelled to serve as a temporary dispensary. It has been made both convenient and comfortable and is, in some ways, admirably adapted for its present use, for it is possible to isolate doubtful cases. It contains a clerk's room, two waiting rooms, three examining rooms, a weighing room; a bath room, a small isolation room, and a milk laboratory. The latter consists of two connecting rooms on the ground floor, one for cleaning and sterilizing bottles, the other for modifying milk. The dispensary hours are from 1:30 to 2:30 P.M. daily, except Sundays and holidays.

The working staff, at this time, consists of a medical director, who gives his entire time to the work, six assistant physicians, one of whom visits in the home if the baby is too ill to be brought to the dispensary, and four nurses, who are no longer connected with the visiting nurse association, as their entire time is needed here. One nurse remains at headquarters, the others visit in the homes of the babies who have been brought for treatment or inspection. The daily average attendance at the dispensary last summer was fifteen. The highest number for one day was 28; for one month (August), 418. This year, in June, the daily average was 28, the highest number for one day was 57. The attendance for the month was 715, 166 new babies being registered; 2150 milk deliveries were made in June.

There is in the dispensary an emergency room, where babies desperately ill may be kept and cared for, but, as a rule, a baby needing constant care is sent to one of the city hospitals.

A large supply of all baby necessities is kept on hand, from bottles and nipples to clothing and diapers, which are supplied to the mothers at nominal cost, as the idea is not to pauperize, but to educate and help. When clothing is loaned, it is with the distinct understanding that it must be washed and ironed before being returned. Very often the clothing must be rewashed, but it is found that the mothers set greater



NURSE INSTRUCTING MOTHERS HOW TO CLEAN BOTTLES AND NIPPLES



NURSE DISTRIBUTING EDUCATIONAL CIRCULARS TO MOTHERS IN A CONGESTED DISTRICT

value on articles which must be well cared for. A strict account of all loans and purchases is kept,—indeed for the soul that delights in records here is a most systematic and complete assortment.

The mother, the baby, and the doctor are all kept in touch with each other, and any baby's history may be readily looked up. The baby's chart is kept in an index file and gives a statement of its condition on entering, with a record, and a weight chart. The report of the nurse, which fits inside that of the doctor, gives space for home conditions such as occupation, income, material circumstances, charitable aid, sanitary condition of house, Are instructions followed? If not, why?, ice or ice box available, etc.

There is a smaller card system for use in quick reference which has interesting headings under diagnosis,—“primary, subsequent and final” showing that recognition is given to the fact that in dealing with babies we learn much from experience.

Where artificial feeding is necessary, and the mother has sufficient intelligence to prepare the food at home after being taught,—a diet slip is used with directions very plainly given.

In visiting this dispensary, I was impressed with the delightful air of warm human interest in all the work, quite opposed to any institutional savor. The medical report of last year closed with the statement that the work of the nursing, clerking and cleaning staff had not been measured by hours but by interest. People of all classes in the city are interested in the work and are doing what they can to help it along; every one seems to know about it. As far out as Mentor, I found a small boy cultivating radishes and selling them at exorbitant rates to his mother, “for the babies.”

The plans for the hoped-for hospital are most complete and interesting, and it is so much needed, and Cleveland is so noted for its public spirit in charitable lines, that we hope before long we shall be able to describe the buildings in detail as no longer being on paper but actually under way.



DEAR subscribers, when you are writing for change of address, please don't forget that the “other fellow” has to hunt for “a needle in a bottle of hay” if you fail to mention your old address as well as the new one.